



A Message from the President

Dear Students,

I hope you are well and finding your classes intellectually engaging. I have heard wonderful things from your faculty about your curiosity and engagement. They are impressed with the entire Class of 2024 and eager to get to know you better over the course of the semester and on campus in the spring.

As you know, we had very much hoped to provide a limited campus experience for you this fall. However, after a comprehensive review these past several weeks, we have determined this is not possible. We know that having to wait until spring to come to campus is extremely disappointing. It is for us, as well. We are all eager to be together in person.

Several considerations led to this difficult decision, despite our best hopes. Among the most salient:

- The public health conditions in Memphis still do not support a robust campus experience this fall. While total numbers are dropping and COVID-19 related hospitalizations are down from where they were in the midsummer, the test positivity rate is still above 10% and has been for several weeks. At this level, health experts tell us we must assume we would have campus outbreaks. Shelby County Schools remain fully remote. Public health experts are also concerned about potential spikes stemming from the recent Labor Day holiday.
- We do not want to bring you to campus only to have you stuck by yourself in your room for days or weeks at a time. Our conversations this week with the Shelby County Health Department raised concerns about the likelihood of widespread isolation and quarantine, even if campus cases remained low. We've been closely monitoring how other national liberal arts colleges in locations similar to ours have been able to react to COVID-19. Some of our sister colleges in urban areas have had to close their campuses because local health departments ordered entire residence halls into isolation, even though case numbers were relatively low.
- Our proposal to create a campus bubble by requiring students to remain on campus at all times appears increasingly unrealistic as we talk with students and families and see what is occurring on other campuses. Recent guidance from the CDC and the federal government indicates that students

should not return home if outbreaks occur on campus. This means that our ability to limit and manage outbreaks is compromised.

The very good news is that testing and treatment continue to improve, as does the Memphis public health situation. We believe that an on-campus spring is ahead of us and we are focusing our energy on making it a good one for you and for our other students. Premature re-opening this fall could put that at risk.

Our students are on my mind every day. I hear your stories of disappointment but also of resilience, creativity, and academic achievement. I feel your enthusiasm for learning. I admire your strength and bless the support you are receiving from your families.

You'll be receiving another note from us next week laying out some of our initial plans for the spring semester. We plan to begin with an on-campus welcome week just for you and your class. Our entire faculty and staff remain deeply committed to prioritizing your health and your education. We are here for you as you navigate your first semester of classes.

Best,
Marjorie

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